

**Vice President Michael R. Pence**

Prepared Remarks – NASA Astronaut Candidate Announcement  
Johnson Space Center – Houston, TX  
Wednesday, June 7, 2017

Governor Abbott, Senator Cruz, Congressman Lamar Smith, Congressman Brian Babin, Acting Administrator Lightfoot, Director Ochoa, distinguished guests – to all the NASA team and the Johnson Space Center – I am deeply honored to have the privilege to congratulate the newest class of American heroes – the 2017 class of American Astronauts.

These are 12 men and women whose personal excellence and courage will carry our nation to even greater heights of discovery – and inspire our children and grandchildren every bit as much as your forebears in this storied American program.

And to this newest class of Astronauts, I bring the sincere congratulations of the 45th President of the United States of America – President Donald Trump.

And I'm here today to tell you that your President is proud of you. And so am I.

And President Donald Trump is firmly committed to NASA's noble mission.

Earlier this year, after the signing of the first NASA Authorization Act in seven years, the President renewed our national commitment to "NASA's mission of exploration and discovery" -- saying we must have "the courage to look for answers in places we have never looked before -- to think in new ways," for as the President said, "new discoveries remind us that in America, anything is possible if we have the courage and wisdom to learn."

It really is a privilege for this lifelong NASA fan to be standing here at the Johnson Space Center -- and on my birthday, no less.

This truly is a special place. For more than half a century, this center has guided America's astronauts in their exploration of the heavens.

You here have managed 211 of America's crewed missions into space -- every single one from Gemini Four in 1965 to the International Space Station at this very moment.

Here, you have navigated the first members of the human family to the moon -- brought the crew of Apollo 13 back home safe and sound -- and even now, you walk our astronauts through their duties as they walk above in space.

You know, I caught “Space Fever” as a little boy in a small town in Southern Indiana.

Some of the most precious memories of my youth were gathered around the television, watching the black and white images of your predecessors expanding the horizons of human knowledge with American leadership and American courage.

As a member of Congress, I asked to serve on the NASA subcommittee, and had the privilege, along with my wife and children, to attend several shuttle launches at the Kennedy Space Center.

I have no doubt that my son, who is now a Marine Corps aviator, was inspired as he sat in the grandstands and watched with awe as America’s heroic astronauts hurtled into the heavens.

I said at the time, that to see the sights and sounds of a launch at Cape Canaveral was like seeing the Earth giving birth to a piece of the sun and sending it home.

Americans marvel at these new astronauts – and those who’ve gone before.

Only 338 Americans have ever held the title of American astronaut.

But while their numbers have been few, their accomplishments have been legion – and the tales of our astronauts are testament to the indomitable spirit of the United States of America.

The astronauts of NASA have expanded our horizons and our hopes and inspired not only the American people, but all the world, with their extraordinary achievements.

The names of their missions adorn the mantle of American greatness – Mercury, Gemini, Apollo, our Space Shuttles, from Atlantis to Enterprise, and more.

And the names of our heroic astronauts have been carved into our hearts – Alan Shepard, John Glenn, and the rest of Mercury Seven – Sally Ride and Mae Jemison – and all the men and women who took our nation to new heights.

But it's not just the astronauts.

As you 12 well know, you couldn't go anywhere without the more than 17,000 men and women of NASA and the contractors who send you to the heavens and bring you back home safe.

Rest assured: In this administration, NASA will have the resources and support you need to continue to make history, to push the boundaries of human knowledge, and to advance American leadership in the boundless frontier of space.

Under President Donald Trump, America will lead in space again.

President Trump recognizes that America needs a coherent and cohesive approach to the last, and greatest, frontier in history.

That's why I'm especially excited to announce, more than two decades after it was disbanded, that soon, President Donald Trump will relaunch the National Space Council – and it will be my great honor, as Vice President of the United States, to serve as Chairman.

America needs a National Space Council once again. Twice before in our nation's history, America has had a federal body charged with advising the President on a national policy and strategy for space.

The first Space Council helped marshal America's "energies and skills" during the infancy of our nation's attempts to reach the stars. And it was under the Council's watch that America put a man in outer space and put a man on the moon with less than a decade between them.

Our National Space Council will reenergize the pioneering spirit of America – and it will ensure that America never again loses our lead in space exploration and technology.

As President Trump said in his inaugural address, we will continue to "unlock the mysteries of space," but to do so, we must reorient our civilian space program toward deep space and exploration and provide the capabilities for America to maintain a constant presence in low-Earth orbit and beyond.

The American spirit is as limitless as space itself – and by tapping the bottomless well of American innovation, through increased collaboration with the commercial space industry, we can seize opportunities that will benefit our nation and our people for generations to come.

History has been made in these halls – and today, we’re making history once again.

Before me stand 12 men and women who have already soared to tremendous heights – the newest class of American astronauts.

You have already distinguished yourselves. As Administrator Lightfoot mentioned, more than 18,300 people applied to be members of this class – smashing the previous record of 8,000 applicants set in 1978.

And you are the 12 who made it through. You have joined the elites. You are the best of us. And you carry on your shoulders the hopes and dreams of all the American people.

And your families must feel an almost inexpressible sense of pride – for you have been chosen to become astronauts – something so many Americans once dreamed about, in the flights of fancy of our youth.

But for you, that flight became your future, that dream became your destiny – and in the years to come, you will depart from this blue marble, and take your place among the roll call of American legends who have broken past the bonds of Earth.

And now their legacy falls to you. You will follow in their contrails – and chart a path into the unknown.

As American astronauts, you may yet return our nation to the Moon – you may be the first to travel to Mars – or you may go still further, to places that we can only imagine.

And as you go forward, be assured: The American people stand with you, and the countless men and women behind the scenes who will carry you into space.

The path you have chosen is hard. But as President Kennedy said not far from here in 1962, we do not choose to do these things “because they are easy,” but rather “because they are hard... because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone,” and that challenge is “one which we intend to win.”

And we will win.

Under the leadership of President Donald Trump, the United States of America will usher in a new era of space exploration that will benefit every facet of our national life.

It will strengthen our national security and the safety of the American people.

It will strengthen our economy, as we unlock new opportunities and new sources of prosperity.

It will strengthen education – in science, technology, engineering, and math.

But more than anything else, under President Donald Trump, we will strengthen the American spirit – as once again, we reach out our hands to touch the heavens, and raise our heads to gaze with wonder at the stars – and the heroes that explore them.

And you 12 will be our vanguard.

You are true heroes – true patriots – and true trailblazers in the best American tradition.

To the 12 members of this new class of American Astronauts – I say congratulations.

You've already captured the respect and admiration of your peers, and when you lift off the launch pad, to boldly go, you will capture the imagination of your nation, and I believe with all my heart, you will not go alone.

For as the Psalmist teaches us, if you rise on the wings of the dawn, if you go up to the heavens, even there His hand will guide you, and His right hand will hold you fast.

As you begin this journey, know you will be carried by grace, and the prayers of the American people.

Godspeed, class of 2017. May God guide you and bless you. May God bless NASA. And may God bless the United States of America.